

# Portraiture

## European Art 1600-1700

*How would you compare the portraits in this room? What do they say about the sitters?*

The 1600s was a key time in portraiture history. Artists experimented with new ways of humanizing and enlivening their sitters. Aristocratic and royal clients commissioned the four large portraits here, letting us compare how painters and sitters used portraiture to define power and status.

### Costume

What people wore in a portrait may not have necessarily been what they wore every day, but the costumes represented real clothing that the sitters would have used at some point. The clothing conveys status and identity.

The opulent silks and a starched lace ruff worn by the Genoese woman (right) were expensive imported goods that required considerable maintenance, drawing attention to her wealth and position.

Since the Louis XIII portrait was used to advertise the boy's marriageability, details such as the sword refer to his future as military leader, while the trim bodice and leggings call attention to his grace, both considered aspects of kingship.

*What do the other costumes say?*



above: Anthony van Dyck (Flemish, 1599–1641). *Portrait of a Woman and Child*, about 1623–25. Oil on canvas; 105 x 72 1/2 in. Gift of the Hanna Fund 1954.392

below: Frans Pourbus the Younger (Flemish, 1569–1622). *Portrait of Louis XIII as a Child*, 1611. Oil on canvas; 73 1/2 x 48 1/4 in. Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund 2003.225



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### Setting

The background might have been invented or it might represent a recognizable place, but it always helped define the sitters' identities.

For Charles II, the naval forces don't represent an actual battle. Since the English king was in exile, the background imagines his return to England.

In Calabazas, the blank background de-emphasizes his role as a jester in the Spanish royal palace and forces us to concentrate on his humanity.

*What do the other settings say?*

### Style

Choice of colors, use of line, and the way of handling paint also express the sitters' positions and status.

The sumptuous colors and full-bodied figures of the Genoese woman fill the canvas, conveying luxury and her family's power.

The hard, linear style and acidic colors of Louis XIII convey facts about the boy as a marriage prospect. Clarity, rather than personality, are paramount.

*What do the other styles mean?*

### Scale

The portrait's size also makes an important statement about the sitter.

Velázquez's painting of Calabazas in a full-length portrait emphasizes that the jester isn't just a servant, but important to the court, giving incredible dignity to the man.

Charles II comes out of an older Renaissance tradition of three-quarter-length portraits of leaders standing in armor, linking him to a long tradition of rulers, key for an exiled king.

*What do the sizes of the other portraits imply about the sitters?*



above: Diego Velázquez (Spanish, 1599–1660). *Portrait of the Jester Calabazas*, about 1631–32. Oil on canvas; 78 1/2 x 52 7/16 in. Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund 1965.15

below: Philippe de Champaign (French, 1602–1674). *Portrait of King Charles II of England*, 1653. Oil on canvas; 71 11/16 x 55 1/2 in. The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Collection 1959.38

